595 not appreciate marital fidelity the same way we do. A wife's un-
837 faithfulness is severely punished by the laws. But adultery may be discovered and known to all without causing shame or remorse. This is a marked difference between our way of thinking and that of the Nkundó. They maintain that a passing infidelity which is not followed through does not denote an absence of love for one's spouse, even if it is repeated. In spite of the implausibility of this statement, I had to accept it, for those who argued with me were so many, their positions so various, and they were really serious. Among them were a number of Christians with whom we are very satisfied and who conduct themselves admirably, as do their wives. They consider these errors to be momentary failings [48] due to passion, which permit love to remain. Indeed, often these men and women are models in the performance of their other duties. This misbehaviour is without doubt considered very serious -- their anger shows clearly that they do not consider it trivial -- but it does not exclude love and thus, as far as everything else is concerned, the spouses continue giving proof of it to each other.

Let us not forget that many elements may lead to a fall and that consciences may go far astray. On the other hand, the fact that a husband is tolerant, even to the point of exploiting his wife, does not exclude a certain love for her; a husband may be extremely indulgent and at the same time jealous to the point of crime. All that may be found among the Whites, after all. Love without the feeling of duty will not suffice to sustain a union.

Moreover, there is no dogma, no moral teaching based on religion, to restrain the instincts. And we should add that among these
[562] primitive people, the woman's natural tendency to please, to submit to a man's desires, is highly developed. In Europe these feelings are channeled by the Christian religion and its influence on society. Here
[836] they encounter no direct obstacle except for sanctions. Before marriage sexual passion and all sensations connected with it and adjunct to it can be pursued without physical, moral, or social obstacles, at least at the present time. The surroundings in which a girl grows up and the example and conversations of her companions will tend even to push her in that direction.

856 During a girl's early childhood beginning when she is still
864 nursing, a mother with foresight will work to make her organs as perfect as possible. By applying pressure repeatedly and for long periods, she molds, so to speak, the outside in order to make it narrow, as this quality is greatly valued by our people.

It is the mother, too, who trains the girl in her preparations for married life. She teaches her how to behave toward her future husband, and at the same time instructs her in the duties of a good housewife (see Chapter X, Article VIII).

836 Certain forms of behavior, although their relationship to our
864 subject is only superficial and external, must nevertheless be mentioned. An adult man will often take in his arms a little girl who has not yet been weaned, or perhaps only slightly more developed. He considers this child to be his wife. He has paid no bride price for her. But since she is a sister, cousin, or other relative of one of his wives, she is a "wife" from his point of view; that is, not only will it be possible for him to marry her later on, but even without becoming her husband he will enjoy a certain liberty in relation to her. (1) Thus, when such a man takes his young "wife" in his arms,

1. See Chapter VI, Article V, 2.

he is enjoying an anticipation of the future and speaks to her [66] in that sense, often accompanying his words with intimate caresses.

The same practice, mutatis mutandis, may be observed on the part of a woman toward a small boy whom she can consider as her "husband."

304 2. Circumcision
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Circumcision is generally practiced. It is usually performed at an early age. Without going into the details at this point (1) or

1. They will be found in Chapter X, Article VII.

549 available to me, the government recognizes the presence of 702 free women out of a population of 8,386 persons who are not permanent residents.

Article IV. Premarital Sexuality

•896 Under this heading we will examine:

1. What the Nkundó think about virginity.
2. Relations between single people.
3. The Nkundó's attitude toward births outside of wedlock.

1. Virginity

The word "virginity" has a double meaning. It may signify the presence of the hymen, the wholeness of the body, or it may have the meaning given in the dictionary: "virgin, a girl who has never had intercourse with a man."

Because of the practice described in Article II, 1, Nkundó girls who remain physically virgin until adulthood are extremely rare. Even if a girl does not begin sexual life until after her body has reached maturity -- a situation which occurs rarely today but which was formerly common, (2) [78] she will not give herself up to carnal

2. See no. 2 of the present article.

pleasures until after she has broken her hymen.

585 836 What is the Nkundó attitude toward virginity? This question must be divided into two parts:

1) Does the future husband attach any importance to the physical virginity of his fiancée? Evidently not from what we have seen.

2) Does he attach any importance to her moral virginity? That is, is it a matter of indifference to him whether or not he is the first to have intercourse with her?

585 836 To say that it makes absolutely no difference to him might be too extreme a statement. But it is certainly not very important to him, since the primary purpose of his marriage is to obtain progeny and to follow his natural instinct in an honest fashion. This does not mean that he likes to marry a woman of loose morals; quite the contrary.

171 585 836 What is the linguistic data on the subject of virginity? In an interesting paper entitled "The Principles of Bantu Marriage" (Africa Vol. 2, No. 3 (1929), p. 255), E. Torday says, "Some of the most competent philologists assure us that in most Bantu languages there is no word for 'virgin'; . . . . The Wachagga, who may be an exception, use the word 'unimpaired,' and it is perhaps in the use of similar expressions, not exclusively applied to physical virginity, that we shall find the explanation of the absence of a specific term."

585 836 192 Thus the Lonkundó have a noun: ekátɛ́. It is derived from the root kát (the verb is -kátema), which means "to be firmly attached, to be tenacious" (e.g., lokátɛ́, "tenacity"). Ekátɛ́ designates something which is difficult to open, to separate, to break up, especially fruit with a tough, hard, thick rind. It is applied to the litɔ́fɛ́, lisɛ́njá, and the lindongɔ́ when it is impossible to break the shell which contains the edible portion even though the fruit is ripe. [79] This term is used in a figurative sense for a woman who resists seduction, who "does not allow herself to be opened." It is not at all specific and in no way the equivalent of our word "virginity," rather it seems to signify "chastity."

Other Nkundó tribes seem to have a specific word, bokotɔ́. I learned this term from natives living between the Ikelemba and the Tshuapa, both east and west of the Julɛ́, as well as from some Basɛ́ká Bongwalanga from the old Lulonga District. The missionaries of the Apostolic Prefecture of Basankusu use it in their publications to mean "virginity, virgin." I was not able to get an exact idea of its precise meaning, but as far as I was able to make out it is much closer to "virgin chastity" than ekátɛ́. In any case it includes no reference to physical virginity. (1)

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1. We should not be astonished that "primitive" tribes have no word in their language

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which specifically expresses our idea of virginity, nor deduce from its absence that the thing itself is unknown to them. The Greeks and Romans were well acquainted with it, yet they had no precise word for it. Parthenos and Virgo mean simply "unmarried girl." The Germanic words such as Maagd and Jungfrau, which now signify "virgin," originally had the same meaning as the Greek and Latin terms.

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836 The foregoing does not imply that every Nkundó girl is free to have sexual relations and that public opinion approves of libertinism among single people. We will examine this question in the following paragraphs.

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864 2. Sexual relations between single people

In dealing with this question we must distinguish between relations between adults and the contacts between nonadults. We will therefore examine the two situations separately so that at the end we can attempt to explain the changes in native attitudes in this realm that have occurred. [80]

A. Before physical maturity. We will first relate what the natives tell about customary practices in the past, and then describe the practices of the present day.

In the past, sexual contacts between young people not yet marriageable were severely punished by their parents. The children were taught that those who were guilty would be struck down by a very serious illness which was inevitably fatal. This illness was called by the generic term ndota (1), and the more specific one, esémbéji.

1. Ndota is the name of the illness which is the punishment for an infraction of a sexual

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prohibition under any circumstances. I have heard these same terms used also by the natives in the vicinity of Coquilhatville.

The body becomes flabby and without strength, and this weakness ends in a fatal paralysis (byongé nnyǎnyuka or nkatáánâ). In addition, the girls feared that their sexual organs, not yet fully formed, would be torn. They were also imbued with a very intense fear: bofolu w'aende, "the fear of males," bofolu w'ǎmato, "the fear of females." They also feared death -- bálotákí iwâ. The parents added that sexual acts were free from danger only between persons of the requisite age.

836 This does not mean that children did not commit indecent acts.
864 The game of ioto, in which little girls try to cook (and which is al-
838 ways one of their favorite games (2) as it probably is throughout the

2. Some boys imitate this game in order to acquire the habit of preparing their own meals. Later they benefit from it on more than one occasion.

world), often gave rise to it. Small boys joined in the game in order to taste the meal. And quite naturally they began to play at "husband and wife," more or less. Often this game involved only innocent imitations, but other times touching and exhibitions occurred between children of the same sex or of opposite sexes. This game is far more dangerous nowadays, [81] because of a change in the attitude of young people toward sexual matters.

The game of yembankongo, in which boys, imitating monkeys, chase each other through the trees and creepers can -- and does - result in reprehensible scenes.

582 In former times most girls were married before puberty. But
178 their husbands did not touch them until they had completed their normal development.

582 Among some individuals the fear of sexual relations was so
838 deeply rooted that it persisted even beyond the age limit and was
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582 conquered only by repeated assaults of passion. Thus it is generally
833 known among the natives that young women used to seek refuge in
864 their mother's house when the husband wanted to begin making use of his rights as a husband. The mother would try to persuade her daughter to submit to the law of life. But sometimes, if her child seemed too resistant, the mother made excuses for her and asked the husband to consider her daughter's youth. The man usually wanted to remain on good terms with his mother-in-law so he did not insist and resigned himself to waiting till nature influenced the spirit and heart of his wife.

Since young people were brought up in deep fear of dangerous relations, it should not surprise us that this feeling became a real habit and did not disappear spontaneously the moment a certain degree of liberty was permitted. As a matter of fact, could we not make similar observations in Europe?

This is the natural explanation for the praiseworthy degree of morality among adolescents in the past.

178 Nowadays all that has changed. The young people follow
836 where their passions lead them. Not the slightest check is placed on
864 their impulses. Parents pay only slight attention to the conduct of their children. [82] It is better not to inquire into the morality of modern youth. Husbands no longer respect the bodies of their adolescent brides, who are themselves quite used to a sexual life and eagerly look forward to it; and no longer know the feeling of "the fear of men." Should we then be astonished at the frightening de-
[164] crease in the birth rate (1) and the ever increasing spread of venereal

1. The natives say that in the past young wives quickly became pregnant. And now ...

diseases, which seem to have been unknown in the past?

The reasons for this change will be investigated further on, under the letter C.

836 B. Between adults. Here the Nkundó are very lenient. There is a difference, however, between the socio-legal and moral viewpoints, although as we shall see the latter is influenced by the former.

[862] A woman is entirely free, legally speaking, as long as the first payment on her bride price has not been made. No man has

562 exclusive rights over her. Hence the proverb: Mbĭmbo ĭle nd'ân's'ɔimbo
836 ĭfa la nkɔlɔ, "boimbo fruit found under the tree have no owner; they
[539] belong to the first person who gathers them." Thus a girl for whom nothing has been paid belongs to no one. A woman free in this manner does not infringe on the rights of any man in her sexual relations. There are therefore no sanctions against her licentiousness.

836 Furthermore, the discovery of her activities gives rise to no
864 shame. At most more serious parents will rebuke children who go too far -- the girls because they abuse the body and reduce their value for a prospective marriage (2), the boys because they [83] run the risk

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2. Not that a smaller bride price would be given for them. But a serious man would rather not take a woman for wife who has "run around" a great deal and therefore is more likely to commit adultery, to be unfaithful, and less likely to become the mother of a numerous progeny.

of financial difficulties (the dangers of adultery, indemnity for childbirth with death as a result, etc.).

626 Public opinion is even more lenient than the parents. This
836 attitude is easy to understand: strangers need fear no unpleasant consequences. Errors of this sort are generally considered natural weaknesses, provided that they do not occur too frequently. For public opinion is hard on people who run from one to another; they are stigmatized with the name ebĭbɔĭ, "unfaithful, flighty, without intelligence or reasoning powers," or ebɔngĭ, a stronger term with the same meaning.

836 From all the foregoing should we deduce that every woman is free to indulge fully in fornication? On the basis of the above considerations we could frankly conclude the affirmative. The behavior that can be observed from day to day fully confirms this answer. Some people stray more or less accidentally, but for others the practice quickly becomes a habit. And it can be said of all of them that

836 they succumb to any favorable opportunity. The validity of this generalization is not affected by extremely rare exceptions which may be encountered and which are due either to a constitutional abnormality or to an extraordinarily firm Christian conviction. How should 834 178 these observations be reconciled with the statement so often heard from natives that the situation was entirely different before the coming of the white men? It was not unusual to see young women not only abstaining from sexual relations but having such a "fear of men" that they drove away seducers and defended their chastity by hitting them with a stick.

When the woman did not accept the young man's proposition, she considered it a grave insult. The initiator was entitled to no indemnity "for blows and wounds." The woman replied only in violent terms, in word or act. [84] Often she went and insulted the mother of the guilty party. When the latter was told the reason for this behavior, she could only turn on her misbehaving son and usually gave him a good talking to; if he was young enough she gave him a good beating. Thus the girl had every right to defend herself.

If the provocation gave rise to no complications in family or society, the parents paid a lot less attention. But they tried to teach [814] their children discretion in these dangerous matters, though their instruction primarily took the form of a lesson after an error was committed, or sometimes apropos of an incident that had befallen someone else. Some parents were very severe. These attitudes were based on a vague sense of morality which was not deduced from philosophical reasoning or religious or superstitious ideas but which was innate and instinctive so to speak. In addition, the fear of excesses and eventual social consequences no doubt also played a considerable [577] role. Excesses were feared above all, and an isolated occurrence was regarded more or less as a momentary weakness.

To form an accurate picture of the situation that existed in the past, we must not lose sight of the fact that, because of very early marriages, the number of young single women was necessarily limited.

562 836 The attitude toward single men was more lenient than toward girls, unless their behavior had any consequences and apart from the danger of their actions becoming habitual, leading inevitably to palavers.

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836 C. An attempt to explain the modern changes. The facts themselves as much as a knowledge of human nature, together with the lenient attitude of parents and the lack of sanctions (the last two points are relevant only to relations between adults), are in direct contradiction to the statements of the natives. Should these not therefore be explained as exaggerations, stemming from a desire for national glory and a resentment of the situation created by colonization? The [124] natives whose strange assertions I have cited are elderly and serious; they demonstrate all the qualities of truthful witnesses. But are they not -- perhaps unconsciously -- laudatores temporis acti? I thought so for a long time and never allowed their statements to carry any weight. I have discussed this question over and over again, not with one or two natives, but with dozens of the most serious and sincere people, under various circumstances and in regions far removed from one another. Yet all supported the same argument, and I could never make my point of view prevail. I always received the same reply: "You Whites are not willing to believe us when we tell you what we know better than you, what is the pure truth. You are so involved in your own point of view!" Finally, before so much formal testimony -- uniform, unchanging, repeated ad nauseum in such varied circumstances as to individuals, times, and places -- my attachment to my own idea began, with some regret, to falter.

But how is it possible to resolve the contradiction between a rather broad liberty and the practice of chastity? And above all how can less than fifty years have sufficed to transform any attachment to virginity into licentiousness? The difficulty presents itself for relations between adults, but it is especially great with respect to reprehensible contacts between nonadults, because of the terrible sanction that we have described above.

The first objection may be partially met if we take into account the habit of "the fear of men," which is acquired and maintained through the severe prohibition against sexual relations before physical maturity and the terrible punishment with which the transgressor is threatened. [86]

The second objection on the other hand is much more serious. It is the one which above all has always kept me from accepting the

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896 thesis of the natives. This is how it is refuted by those who contradict me: "When the first black soldiers and their assistants, archers, and [175] spear carriers were sent by the Whites to conquer us, they committed all sorts of atrocities and permitted themselves all the licentious acts that occurred to them. Among other things they took advantage of young girls, even those who were not nubile. They required immature girls to engage in sexual intercourse. They even went so far as to force people to commit incest, uniting mother and son, father and daughter, pointing a gun at their breasts. (1)

> 1. The fact that the soldiers required that immature girls be delivered over to them, because they were afraid of venereal diseases, is still notorious.

These accusations are so shocking and repugnant that one refuses to admit their veracity. Yet it is possible that they correspond to reality. For one thing, the informants are entirely reliable. For another, the account is internally consistent. As a matter of fact, scenes of the sort described seemed to have occurred at the beginning of almost all colonizations. Their authors were usually the natives of other regions rather than Whites (in our area Europeans were almost entirely absent from the first contacts between the inhabitants and the new power). By the nature of things anything can be expected at such a time. For occupations are carried out under martial law. And everyone is aware that war unleashes the human beast which -- as even contemporary history abundantly shows -- is capable of worse and more repugnant excesses.

It is possible to object to all this for, if the assertions of the natives are true, the events they describe did not give rise to a practice of incest and, consequently, need not have given rise to the far-reaching changes which we have observed. [87] But the two situations are entirely different. For licentious behavior between single people is more or less consistent with the passionate tendencies of human nature, which were mostly checked by the fear of a sanction -- a terrible sanction, it is true, but it was shown in fact to be nonexistent. Incest,

on the other hand, is extremely repugnant by nature, especially for the Nkundó. It is a vice which comes about only as a result of special beliefs or through a fundamental degeneration of sexuality.

The breaking up of the framework of traditional organization may furnish a partial explanation in this realm as in many others. In the case of sexual relations between single adults, it might even be deemed sufficient. As much may be said about greed, vanity, the desire for ostentation and display. These are very natural sentiments in a woman, and they were greatly stimulated by the dazzling riches imported from Europe. But these facts are not sufficient in themselves to account for everything. They are especially and entirely inadequate in explaining the considerable changes in the relations between immature children, and we are thus forced to accept the explanation given by serious natives.

3. Children born out of wedlock

Among the Nkundó, giving birth to a child outside of wedlock has never from time immemorial been considered a grave misdemeanor. It is not considered criminal, as ethnographers say it is among many other African peoples.

Furthermore, this attitude logically follows from the liberty permitted to adolescents, as described above. Neither the woman nor her lover are harassed or punished as a result. On the contrary, the grandparents joyfully receive the child, who adds to the size, power, and wealth of the clan. [88] For an illegitimate child (entombó) (1)

1. Such a child is also known as bona ɗa wané, "child of the sunlight," or bona ɗa bombamboka, "child of the highway" or "of a girl of the streets." Among the Bombomba the term bokelankólo is also heard.

does not belong to its natural father. It is incorporated into the mother's family. It is said that he is born without a father. His

584 For his part, the young man gives her some small game animals
431 (especially the big rat called botómba, lemurs of the genus esendé, etc.) or fish. These gifts have no specific name. The man's gifts are simply called mpatá "gift sent"; the woman's are called botómo, a term used for all presents given by a woman to her lover (see also Chapter VI, Article VII, 2). The verb used with this noun is tumba, "to make burn." Etymologically the two words are in no way related.

Sometimes the sweethearts give each other a secret mutual pledge of their desire to be married. This pledge is called bondengé or bonengé and consists particularly of a necklace of beads called bafomakongo (or, more rarely, bisengé or bisengóla). [103]

581 In choosing their wives, the men allow themselves to be motivated by the various factors which may influence them in this realm, such as physical or moral attractions. Wealth or social rank almost never play a part in determining the choice. Youth is easily carried away by physical attraction and passionate love. Men who are already more settled as well as the more sensible young men pay more attention to moral qualities, such as general conduct, submissiveness, goodness, gentleness, and especially diligence, careful attention to work, etc. In short, we find here the full range of individual variations that are encountered elsewhere, with the exception of marriages motivated by financial or political interests or by the degree of moral elevation that can be aroused by the Christian religion, such as pure devotion.

584 After a few days of courtship the girl lets her suitor know that if he really loves her he had better settle the matter and that consequently he must obtain her parents' consent. Meanwhile they have
● [834] already had intimate relations several times; therefore the moment of official negotiations should not be delayed.

586 Seeking a wife who is already married is in no way different
587 from the procedure we have just described, but a great deal of circum-
584 spection must be used so that the husband's suspicions will not be aroused. The exchange of the secret pledge we have mentioned occurs especially in this situation.

Once the divorce is completed, the woman falls in the same category as a single girl since she is free.

Seeking a future wife in an as yet unborn child or one that is very young will be discussed in a special section (Chapter IV, Article I). [105]

584 The young man informs his own parents of his intentions, and they make certain that this marriage merits [106] consideration and that there are no obstacles or too great difficulties that might cause trouble later on.

For the official negotiations the suitor and his father (or a substitute for the latter) go to the home of the girl's parents, who inquire as to the purpose of their visit, and when they discover that so-and-so would like to marry their daughter, they ask: "How do you want her?" (1) "I want her for my wife," he replies. Whereupon they

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1. That is, do you want her as your legitimate wife, or are you only planning to live with her for a time? In this fashion the parents of the intended assure themselves that the suitor has serious intentions of contracting a real marriage

tell him to make the necessary arrangements to make the first payment on the bride price. When the two parties have come to an agreement the parents of the intended conclude the conversation by saying: "We are not opposed; it is up to you."

[586] The formalities of the negotiations in the case of a woman who already has a husband do not differ from those for a girl who is free. Only, in the first instance the proceedings must go on with great circumspection so as not to anger the abandoned husband. In addition the woman's parents inform the suitor and his family of the amount of the bride price they must bring in order to reimburse the first husband. (2)

2. See Chapter VIII, Articles II and III.

In cases of engagement before birth or at a very early age, the same procedures are observed, but they are adapted to the special circumstances of the situation, which will be explained in detail in Chapter IV.

After the negotiations have thus begun, the suitor's father prepares the first payment of the bride price which, accompanied by his son and the ndonga, he delivers to the future wife's family. But let us first explain the ndonga.